

**Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association;
the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of
human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran; and the Special Rapporteur on minority issues**

REFERENCE: AL
IRN 4/2015:

12 May 2015

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran; and Special Rapporteur on minority issues pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 24/5, 22/20, 28/21, and 25/5.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning **mass arrests, detention and harassment of Ahwazi Arabs minorities in Khuzestan Province.**

According to the information received:

On 14 March, Mr. [REDACTED], an Ahwazi Arab street vendor, reportedly died from burn wounds suffered from setting himself on fire in Khorramshahr in protest at ongoing harassment by local authorities, who had repeatedly confiscated his produce stall. On 13 March 2015, the stall was confiscated, reportedly due to it being unlicensed.

On 14 March 2015, as directed by the authorities, Mr. [REDACTED] applied for a permit with the Municipal Office, to operate his fruit stall. After being denied the required permit, Mr. [REDACTED] allegedly threatened to commit suicide by setting himself on fire. Mr. [REDACTED] proceeded to light himself on fire in front of the Municipal Office resulting in burns to 92 per-cent of his body.

Following the incident of self-immolation, it is alleged that Mr. [REDACTED] was treated by two different hospitals, in Khorramshahr and Ahvaz, both of which provided inadequate care. Needing specialized attention, his family reportedly paid the costs for the ambulance necessary to transfer him to the advanced burn center at Motahhari Hospital where, on 22 March 2015, eight days after the incident, Mr. [REDACTED] died.

Mr. [REDACTED] has since become a symbol for the province's Arab community, and as a result, numerous protests have been held in several Arab-majority cities, including Khorramshahr and Ahvaz. On 17 March 2015, it was reported that about 1,000 people were arrested at a protest where a banner was displayed stating in Arabic: "We are all [REDACTED]." A police spokesperson reported that most protestors were released only after signing a "pledge." The contents of this aforementioned "pledge" are unknown. Allegedly, some of the protestors are still detained with criminal charges being filed against them.

Authorities have reportedly visited Mr. [REDACTED]'s family and wife on numerous occasions, most recently on 3 April 2015, harassing, threatening and demanding that they remain silent about his death. On 22 March 2015, Mr. [REDACTED]'s father, brother and a tribal leader were allegedly detained for eight hours and forced to sign a document promising to hold quiet mourning and funeral services outside of the city. The family had attempted to retrieve Mr. [REDACTED]'s body from the Motahhari hospital prior to this incident but this was denied. They were informed by the hospital that intelligence services had instructed them not to release the body to his family. Reportedly, it was not until after the incident took place that Mr. [REDACTED]'s body was released to the family.

Furthermore, from mid-March to April 2015 in the city of Ahvaz and surrounding towns and villages, estimates that up to 100 Ahwazi Arabs, including activists, and several minors, were arrested and detained following peaceful protests that had been organized in the lead up to the 10th anniversary of the 15 April 2005 Ahwazi uprising. Information received indicates that the arrests have been carried out without warrants by groups of armed and masked men allegedly affiliated with Iran's security and intelligence services. Raids also occurred on Ahwazi houses, taking place in the late evening or early hours of the morning. Moreover, it is alleged that the status and whereabouts of numerous detainees are unknown to date. This appears to reflect a broader pattern of discrimination and harassment against Ahwazi Arabs in the region, who are often deprived of economic and social rights.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, we wish to express our concerns at a series of actions by the Iranian authorities who appear motivated by discrimination against the Ahwazi Arabs minority for expressing dissenting views or exhibiting their identity and culture. Further concerns remain about the threats and harassment of Mr. [REDACTED]'s family members and also the ongoing incarceration of a number of protesters. We urge your Excellency's Government to take all steps necessary to protect the right of people to freedom of expression and peaceful assemblies.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Reference to international law Annex** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

It is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention. We would therefore be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Are the facts alleged in the summary of the cases accurate?
2. Please provide any additional information and any comment you may have on the above mentioned allegations.
3. Please specify the legal basis for the arrest and detention of a large number of protesters on 17 March 2015. Please explain how these arrest and compatible with international norms, specifically with those contained, inter alia, in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
4. Please provide the details, and where available the results, of any investigation, medical examinations, and judicial or other inquiries carried out in relation to the case of Mr. [REDACTED]. In the event that your investigations support or suggest the above allegations to be correct, the accountability of any person responsible of the alleged violations should be ensured. If no inquiries have taken place, or if they have been inconclusive, please explain why.
5. Please provide legislation and/or measures taken to protect religious minorities in the country, including prevention of discrimination against any person based on his or her religious or ethnic background.

We would appreciate receiving a response within 60 days.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person responsible for the alleged violations.

Your Excellency's Government's response will be made available in a report to be presented to the Human Rights Council for its consideration.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Maina Kiai
Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

Heiner Bielefeldt
Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

Ahmed Shaheed

Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran

IZSÁK Rita
Special Rapporteur on minority issues

Annex
Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to refer your Excellency's Government to articles 9 and 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which provide for protection against arbitrary arrest or detention and for the recognition of the right of peaceful assembly.

Article 27 of the ICCPR provides that "In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language."

We would also like to refer to Human Rights Council resolution 24/5, and in particular operative paragraph 2 that "reminds States of their obligation to respect and fully protect the rights of all individuals to assemble peacefully and associate freely, online as well as offline, including in the context of elections, and including persons espousing minority or dissenting views or beliefs, human rights defenders, trade unionists and others, including migrants, seeking to exercise or to promote these rights, and to take all necessary measures to ensure that any restrictions on the free exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association are in accordance with their obligations under international human rights law."

Article 2 (1) of the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Form of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief stresses that no one shall be subject to discrimination by any State, institution, group of persons, or persons on the grounds of religion or other belief. Besides, Article 3 of the Déclaration states that discrimination between human beings on the grounds of religion or belief constitutes an affront to human dignity and a disavowal of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and shall be condemned as a violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and enunciated in detail in the International Covenants on Human Rights, [...].

